

# *Kornelius Martens*

OUR SKILLFUL ADVOCATE



A BIOGRAPHY and  
COLLECTION of POETRY  
and OTHER WRITINGS

AUTHOR and EDITOR  
HELMUT T. HUEBERT



KORNELIUS MARTENS:

Our Skillful Advocate



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A brief Biography and  
Collection of the Poetry  
and other Writings of  
Kornelius Kornelius Martens

Author and Editor  
Helmut T. Huebert



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KORNELIUS MARTENS: Our Skillful Advocate

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KORNELIUS MARTENS  
1880-1940 (?)





“Soon my turn will come, and my  
only crime is that I have faithfully  
served my Lord and Saviour.”

Kornelius Martens

“Our advocate was teacher and minister  
Kornelius Martens . . . He was very  
skillful in his representations.”

J.H. Tiessen



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## INTRODUCTION

Kornelius Martens was a product of the Russian Mennonite experience. He was obviously Mennonite, being a leader in various Mennonite institutions and actively propounding his Mennonite beliefs, particularly regarding non-resistance. He was also involved in Russian life, knowing the language well, receiving university education and often dealing with the authorities.

Martens was a man of many interests. He was specifically trained in economics, languages and pedagogy, but was also involved in administration and committee work. He was deeply religious and tried to pass on his belief to others, including his children. He was Ältester of the Sparrau Mennonite Brethren Church, and often preached the Word of God. He was very interested in nature — and he wrote. Poetry seemed to be his most common literary expression, though he wrote essays and also several novels. The Martens children recall that he read his poems to them, and also remember hearing him read at least one novel.

After his final imprisonment, Martens' second wife Anna had in her possession several handwritten booklets of his poetry and other literary efforts. Unfortunately, these were lost during the vicissitudes of life during World War II. However, a number of his poems had been published in *Friedensstimme*, a paper published in Halbstadt before and during World War I; a few appeared in *Die Hungersnot in Rußland und unsere Reise um die Welt* by D.M. Hofer in 1924. Several were printed in *Unser Blatt*, a publication of the Mennonites in Russia during the 1920s, and the family found a number among old memorabilia.

Kornelius Martens was the half-brother of my father,

Gerhard Huebert. For years I heard from my father what a remarkable man Kornelius Martens had been. Even allowing for the element of family pride, the more I discovered about my uncle, the more I was forced to conclude on my own, that he was indeed unusual. He was a man who had a strong faith in God and love for his fellow beings, he maintained his principles despite tremendous difficulties, and eventually paid for his beliefs with his life.

I believe it is worth collecting, preserving and studying the little that can be found of what Kornelius Martens has written. A brief biography, a collection of his extant poetry and a few examples of his prose may give us a small window into the life of this Mennonite martyr.

Helmut T. Huebert  
Winnipeg, Canada  
April, 1986

# KORNELIUS KORNELIUS MARTENS — CHRONOLOGY

15 November 1880	Born in Wernersdorf, South Russia to Kornelius J. Martens and Helena (nee Wolff). Soon thereafter moved to Spat, Crimea.
August 1887	Father Kornelius J. Martens died.
1887	Started village school in Spat, Crimea.
18 October 1892	Mother married David Huebert, and family moved to Margenau. Continued village school.
1893-1898	Student, <i>Zentralschule</i> , Gnadenfeld.
1898-1900	Student, <i>Pädagogische Schule</i> , Halbstadt.
1900	Became Christian and joined Rückenau Mennonite Brethren Church.
1900-1901	Teacher, village school, Siberia.
1901-1902	Teacher, village school, Samara.
1902-1906	Teacher, village school at Alexanderpol, near Memrik.
3 July 1904	Married Sara Friesen.
1906	Teacher, village school at Nikoljevka (No. 5), Ignatyev Colony.
1906 or 1907	Elected as Mennonite Brethren Minister.
1907-1912	Helped establish, then was teacher at <i>Zentralschule</i> in Nikoljevka (No. 5).

1912-1914	Student at University, St. Petersburg. Worked at Raduga office.
1914	Appointed Rector of Gnadenfeld <i>Handelsschule</i> and Inspector of Gnadenfeld <i>Wolost</i> schools. Minister of Sparrau Mennonite Brethren Church, later <i>Ältester</i> .
1917-1918	Head of Gnadenfeld <i>Wolost</i> for one and a half years.
11 March 1919	Pled with Communist General Dobenko for safety of Mennonite villages.
January 1922	Dismissed from school. Moved to take up farming in Großweide.
January 1925	Delegate to <i>Bundeskonzferenz</i> in Moscow. Elected secretary treasurer of KfK.
October 1926	Participated in All Ukrainian Conference of Mennonite churches in Melitopol.
1930	Forced from farm at Großweide. Family scattered for a time.
Spring 1931	Found work at Stalino. Family gathered there.
28 February 1934	Wife Sara died.
August 1934	Married Anna Klassen.
6 August 1937	Taken by police and imprisoned.
Probably 1940	Said to have died of pneumonia in concentration camp.



## KORNELIUS MARTENS

Kornelius Kornelius Martens was born in Wernersdorf, South Russia, on November 15, 1880.<sup>1</sup> He was the first child of Kornelius Johann Martens and Helena Wolff.<sup>2</sup> Soon after his birth the couple moved to Spat, Crimea, as settlers in the newly established Mennonite colony.<sup>3</sup> The early settlement years were hard, and Kornelius later told how they often had only thin watery soup to eat.

Children born into the family were:

Kornelius	November 15, 1880
Susanna	December 26, 1882
Helena	May 11, 1884
Jakob	July 28, 1886
Abraham	March 14, 1888

In August 1887 father Kornelius Johann Martens died as the result of an accident, leaving the widow Helena with four young dependents and an unborn child.

Kornelius started school that same year. Because the children of widows had the reputation of being undisciplined, his mother gave him strict orders not to be involved in fights with other children. He stuck to this non-resistant principle, but it meant that sometimes boys hit him on the way home from school, and he often came home crying. Finally one day he set aside his principles, and thoroughly thrashed one of his tormentors. Thereafter he had peace, and soon more friends.

Kornelius was a good student; being blessed with an excellent memory, he was first in class. He also had a sense of responsibility, and was proud that he could be a help to his mother, since he was the oldest "man" in the family.

David Huebert, a widower living in Margenau, Molotschna, became interested in widow Martens and first proposed marriage by mail. The answer was no. He received this message while he was thatching the roof of his house. On the roof he stopped, folded his hands, and prayed. A personal appearance by David Huebert in Spat was more successful, and the couple was engaged on October 1, 1892. The wedding ceremony took place on October 18, 1892 at Rückenau, with Rev. Jakob Reimer officiating.<sup>4</sup> The family moved to Margenau, into a small house at the poor end of the village (*Kleinwirtsende*). To the five children of David Huebert and the five of Helena Martens another eight were added through this marriage:

Katharina	May 15, 1894
Sarah	November 4, 1895
Tina	August 4, 1897
Peter	November 16, 1898
Franz	February 20, 1902
Anna	May 18, 1904
Gerhard	April 18, 1906
Berhard	November 15, 1909

What Kornelius particularly appreciated about his stepfather was his piety, his fairness in dealing with the children, and his industriousness. Father Huebert felt that too much leisure would only cause trouble, so everyone, including boys and girls, had to work.

Kornelius continued to be a good student at the Margenau primary school. He was promised financial help to continue his education by the area school inspector. Unfortunately this potential benefactor died, so the family had to skimp and save to send Kornelius to the Gnadenfeld *Zentralschule* (highschool). On one occasion a fellow student stopped him during recess and counted thirteen patches that his mother had carefully sewn onto his jacket. But what did it matter? He was able to continue his education! In the summertime he worked as a cowherd or held other similar jobs to help

finance his education.

After completing school at Gnadenfeld, the promising student, with the help of a scholarship, went to the *Pädagogische Schule* (Teachers College) in Halbstadt for two years. Judged to be the best students, Kornelius Martens and Benjamin Unruh were offered funds to continue their education in Germany. Kornelius' mother opposed the plan, feeling this would make him proud. He accepted his mother's advice, then successfully passed the school examinations and went on to teach.

Kornelius first taught in a village school in Siberia for one year, then in Samara probably for a year. His next position was at Alexanderpol, near Memrik, where he taught four years. While at Alexanderpol he met Sara Friesen, daughter of Julius Friesen, formerly of Waldheim, Molotschna. Unmarried village teachers traditionally had room and board in the various homes of the village. Kornelius also lived in a number of homes, among them the Friesen residence, where he undoubtedly met Sara. The teacher was also expected to preach in church, and again Sara was close at hand, being in the front row of the alto section of the choir. Despite misgivings by her parents because of his poverty, Kornelius and Sara were engaged, then married two weeks later on July 3, 1904. Sara was a gentle woman, appreciated by her husband and later by her children; Kornelius once told his sister Helena: "You may be clever, but my wife is wise!"<sup>5</sup>

Children born into the Martens family were:

Kornelius	September 23, 1905	in Alexanderpol
Sara	December 9, 1906	in Nikoljevka
Helena (Lena)	November 5, 1908	in Nikoljevka
Tusnelda	June 7, 1911	in Nikoljevka
Alexander	March 5, 1915	in Gnadenfeld
	Died in October 1921	of typhus
Heinrich (Heinz)	January 3, 1919	in Gnadenfeld
Elfriede	October 27, 1923	in Großweide
Anneliese	May 28, 1925	in Großweide

In 1906 the Martens family moved to Nikoljevka (No. 5), in the Ignatyev region, where Kornelius again taught school. He helped establish a high school which opened its doors in the autumn of 1907 with 23 students, with Kornelius Martens as a teacher. It was reported that "it is somewhat difficult for our dear Teacher Martens for he teaches religion, German and Russian language etc. alone . . ."<sup>6</sup> Yet the school looked into the future with optimism, had arranged for Teacher Martens to continue in the following year, and was hiring additional staff. In the summers Martens took extra courses to continue his education.

In 1911 Kornelius developed a throat condition (*Kehlkopfkatarrh*), which later became chronic, and which forced him at least temporarily to give up teaching.

The Martens family moved to St. Petersburg in 1912. During the day Kornelius worked as bookkeeper at the St. Petersburg branch of Raduga, which sold mainly Bibles and religious books. Raduga was a Mennonite publishing company established in Halbstadt, Molostchna, in 1909. Besides the printing establishment in Halbstadt, it operated a bookstore in Halbstadt, another in Schönwiese, and had the branch office in St. Petersburg.

Kornelius attended nightschool at the university, completing courses in social and commercial economics as well as in European languages. He seemed to have a special facility with languages, to varying degrees mastering German, Russian, French, English, Latin, Ukrainian and of course Low German. The family lived at 7 Pushkin Street, occupying two rooms, a hall and a tiny kitchen.

On January 16, 1913, during Kornelius' last year of study in St. Petersburg, his mother died as a result of a stroke. Helena Huebert had been sickly for about five months, then had a stroke on January 8, from which she partly recovered, followed by another on January 16, which proved to be fatal.<sup>7</sup> The family sent Kornelius a telegram with the sad news, and knowing of his deep regard for his mother, delayed the funeral for a few days.<sup>8</sup> Train travel being difficult in those times, and not knowing of the delay of the funeral, Kornelius was not

there when his mother was buried on January 20, 1914.

After completing two years of studies in St. Petersburg, Kornelius Martens was appointed inspector of schools for the Gnadenfeld *Wolost* (district) and rector of the Gnadenfeld *Handelsschule* (Business College). He continued on as director of the Gnadenfeld school for some time even under the Communist regime, when it put more stress on language and vocational training (*Realschule* and *Profsschule*).

At the age of 19, after completion of Teachers College, Kornelius had become a Christian, and that summer joined the Rückenau Mennonite Brethren Church. He must have been active in the churches wherever he lived, for at the relatively young age of 26, Martens was elected to be a minister. When he was appointed to the school at Gnadenfeld he joined the Sparrau Mennonite Brethren Church where he served as a minister. After the death of *Ältester* Nikolai Enns, Martens was elected *Ältester* (Elder or Pastor) of the Sparrau congregation. The family lived in the school building in Gnadenfeld, so his work at Sparrau meant travelling back and forth. In the more difficult times Martens often walked the 7 *Werst* (4.6 miles or 7.5 kilometers) to church. His congregation apparently thought "all the world of him."<sup>9</sup> An example of his church related activities were the concluding remarks he made at a *Jugendfest* (Young People's Celebration) in Landskrone on April 29, 1918. Dedication to his Lord and Master was obvious in his admonition to the congregation of almost 1000 people. "You have to choose. There are only two choices: either you are for Christ or against him!"<sup>10</sup>

Despite a heavy workload, Martens still took time for his family. In spring and summertime he would tramp through the fields and forests with his children, teaching them about nature. On cold winter nights the children gathered around the stove where he told them Bible stories. His family remembers him as a man of average height, broad shouldered, with a round face and a small nose. Thin brown hair had trouble covering his bald spot. He had a high forehead, friendly blue eyes and a contagious smile. When he was determined his chin was set firmly, a signal to the children not to ask too many

questions. While he was strict, his children still remember his deep concern for their welfare. There were daily devotions, mornings at the breakfast table, and evenings in the living room. Daughter Tusnelda remarked: "He taught us to pray and to work."<sup>11</sup>

When it was required to spend money for the Martens household or farm, things had to be thought through very carefully, but when it came to books there was no question that they were absolutely necessary! Even illness did not dampen Kornelius' enthusiasm for knowledge. During the typhus epidemic he also contracted the disease, and could lie on only one side because of bedsores. He spent the time conjugating French verbs to take his mind off the pain.

When the news of the unrest in Petrograd reached the Mennonite colonies in 1917, Martens was glad that he and his family were safely in the southern Ukraine. This safety was not to last. Because of the unrest, particularly in cities such as Petrograd, the Czar was forced to abdicate, and for a time a socialist government headed by Kerensky was in power (March to November 1917). During the time of the Kerensky government Martens was elected head of the Gnadenfeld *Wolost*, a position he occupied for about one and a half years.

On one occasion during the unsettled times of the revolution, the *Handelsschule* was surrounded by armed men. Martens and another teacher, Rempel, were apprehended because they had helped a female colleague. Both were to be shot in the schoolyard. The children cried; Martens, hands tied behind his back, said farewell to his wife — then a cleaning lady asked for mercy for the teachers. Rempel was already standing by the fence awaiting execution when unexpectedly the armed men started to barter. For a pair of warm underwear and with stern advice not to mind the business of others, both men were released.

During the time of anarchy following the withdrawal of the German occupying troops in 1918, the Mennonites had organized a *Selbstschutz* (protective or defensive army) in the southern Ukraine. This was an effort to prevent the torture, murder, rape and destruction of property which came as a



KORNELIUS and SARA

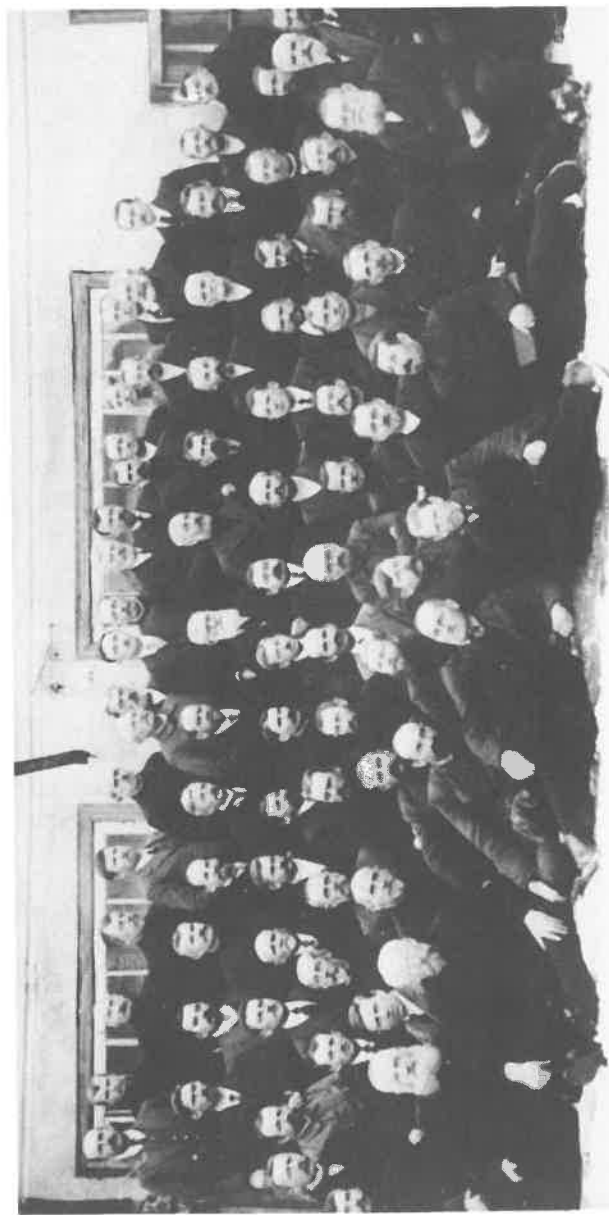
result of roving groups of bandits, such as those led by Nestor Makhno.<sup>12</sup>

This army fended off some of the roving bands of anarchists, but unfortunately for a brief time also fended off the Red Army. On March 11, 1919, Red troops led by General Dobenko invaded Gnadenfeld. The village was surrounded by artillery fire. In full battle array the army stormed into the village to the *Wolost* headquarters. Here two men stepped out to meet the victorious General Dobenko. Kornelius Martens was one of them. He pleaded with the general: "Mr. Dobenko, forgive us!" Then the general let them have it: "You damned renegades from the faith of your fathers. For 400 years you could not take arms, but now for your damned Kaiser Wilhelm . . ." The two delegates were certain they were to die, but Kornelius Martens pleaded once more. "Comrade Dobenko, forgive us!" Finally Dobenko conceded. "I will not kill all, but my soldiers can plunder for three days and where they find *Selbstschützer* (members of the protective army) they may execute them." The villages were ransacked, but not destroyed, and many lives were saved.<sup>13</sup>

Eventually, when the Soviet government was more firmly entrenched, the schools were soon under Communist control. Kornelius Martens was released from his position as director of the vocational school and was required to pay a substantial fine within 48 hours.<sup>14</sup> On January 6, 1922 the family moved from Gnadenfeld to Großweide. There Martens started to farm, though he continued his church and other related activities. In the spring of 1922 he helped divide the fields in Großweide; thereafter he was appointed the official *Landmesser* (land surveyor) for the village.

Because Kornelius Martens understood economics and the laws of the land, people often came to him for help and advice. His well known stand on non-resistance enabled him to represent Mennonite youths when they appeared at court hearings to establish their non-resistant status. Many years later J.H. Tiessen remembered that "our advocate was teacher and minister Kornelius Martens, Großweide-Gnadenfeld. He was very skillful in his representations."<sup>15</sup>





Delegates to the General Conference of Mennonite Churches in Russia held at Moscow in January, 1925. This conference might well be called the Second Martyrs Synod of the Anabaptists, since many of the delegates were later imprisoned or exiled for their faith. Fourth row from the front, sixth from the left is Aron Dück, then is *Ältester* Alexander Ediger, with Kornelius Martens eleventh from the left. Second row, second from the left is Gerhard Lohrenz.

On one occasion the judge asked for an explanation of the triune God. Martens countered with another question. If the judge could tell him why a tree on the road they had travelled the previous day was divided into three equal branches, yet was still one tree, then he would explain the trinity. The judge changed the subject.<sup>16</sup>

Mennonites in Russia had for some time felt the need for a common voice in dealing particularly with government agencies. An organizing conference had been held at Schönsee in 1910, which appointed a *Glaubenskommission* (Faith Commission) to deal with the various problems being faced. Another conference was held in 1912, at which the name of the committee was changed to *Kommission für Kirchenangelegenheiten* (commonly abbreviated to KfK, translated Commission for Church Affairs). During the revolutionary period all commission and conference activities ceased, but then resumed again when reasonable stability returned to the land. The first conference after the revolution was held at Chortitza in 1922, then was followed by another in Moscow. Kornelius Martens was one of the 74 delegates at the *Bundeskonferenz der Mennonitengemeinden Rußlands* (General Conference of Mennonite Churches in Russia) held in Moscow in January, 1925. Conference leader was *Ältester* Jakob Rempel. Kornelius Martens was elected secretary. Various questions and problems relating to church work were discussed; Martens emphasized the value of Bible conferences in the life of the church. At this conference the executive of the *Kommission für Kirchenangelegenheiten* (KfK) was elected.<sup>17</sup> Alexander Ediger of Schönsee was chairman, Aron Dück vice-chairman and Kornelius Martens secretary-treasurer.<sup>18</sup> At his election, Martens had said: "Lord, I am at your feet, I am yours."<sup>19</sup>

Gerhard Lohrenz, also a delegate at this conference, remembered Martens as being not quite six feet tall, broad in general build, though not stout. He was dignified, and very careful in his choice of words.<sup>20</sup>

A new publication, *Unser Blatt*, was initiated at this conference with Alexander Ediger as the editor.<sup>21</sup> Kornelius

Martens was the secretary-treasurer, but also contributed articles and poetry. *Unser Blatt* (translated "Our Paper") first appeared in October, 1925, with a monthly run of about 2,500 copies. It was produced in Melitopol, and continued publication until at least June, 1928.

Kornelius Martens also participated in the All Ukrainian Conference of Mennonite Churches held in Melitopol in October, 1926. He reported to the delegates regarding the KfK treasury, but also represented the Molotschna by outlining the status of the churches in that region. When it was suggested that *Unser Blatt* be published more often, he explained the tremendous difficulties encountered in even a monthly issue. By a unanimous vote he was re-elected to the KfK executive.<sup>22</sup>

At the death of his father-in-law, Julius Friesen, on December 31, 1926, Martens served as one of the ministers at the funeral, and also described the event in *Unser Blatt*.<sup>23</sup>

During these years the family often considered the question of emigration. In a letter to a friend dated January, 1925,<sup>24</sup> Martens seemed willing to resettle, but remarked: "Without the help of others we cannot move under the present circumstances." They simply did not have the money to pay the 2,000 Ruble travel costs and the 150 Rubles required for each passport. This was complicated by the medical condition of Sara, his wife. She had heart failure, a complication of typhus which she had contracted in 1921. Since symptoms increased every year, Martens felt it was wiser not to move. He said: "It is the Lord's way, he still needs me here."

On July 7, 1929 Kornelius and Sara Martens celebrated their silver wedding anniversary. Their seven children were present as well the elderly Mrs. Friesen (Sara's mother), almost the entire Sparrau congregation, the whole village of Großweide and many friends from the surrounding villages. Abraham Nickel, *Ältester* of the neighbouring Rudnerweide church began the proceedings by referring to Psalm 92:2. He emphasized that God had helped in many aspects of the marriage, but also particularly in the many forms of work the brother was doing in the church and for the Mennonites of

Russia. Ältester Alexander Ediger of Schönsee, chairman of the KfK, mentioned that the life of the celebrating couple was active and many-faceted, often very difficult, and yet there was so much to thank for. Aron Dück, minister of the Margenau church, and Peter Köhn, minister of the Molotschna Mennonite Brethren Church also addressed the couple and the congregation. After a number of young people had served with recitation of appropriate poetry, Kornelius himself reminisced about the past 25 years. He claimed many an answer to prayer, and had often felt the power of the prayers of the church — almost like a supportive wall being present. On that day he could say: "Praise be to God for everything. I have kept faith in the good principles of our Mennonite heritage, faith in our just cause, and in God's promises." The celebration was closed by singing "*Lobe den Herren, den mächtigen König der Ehren*" (Praise to the Lord, the Almighty). Following an inspiring prayer the congregation departed.<sup>25</sup>

An uncle of Kornelius lamented the fact that he had not been able to attend the silver wedding celebration, but also added a sentence in his letter which shows that there was at least a hint of suspicion of educated people in Mennonite circles even at that time. ". . . I was overjoyed that your brother Kornelius visited us last winter and that despite all his education he still loves his Saviour and works in his vineyard . . ." This was also testimony to his continuing diligent efforts in the work of the Kingdom of God.<sup>26</sup>

Kornelius Martens was often taken to Melitopol during these years, to account for his various church and related activities. The authorities sometimes detained him for up to two weeks; on at least one occasion his travel was restricted to the borders of his own village of Großweide.

In 1930 the villages of the Molotschna were being collectivized. Since Martens was a minister he was not allowed to participate in a collective farm. His land was gradually taken away from him, with only 16 dessiatines (about 43.2 acres) remaining, yet he was forbidden to sell the land. Then came the demand for a special tax in the form of grain. In one week the

required amount was delivered. Fourteen days later the Martens received notice requiring twice as much grain as the first time. They sold two cows and at night went to the neighbouring villages to obtain the necessary grain. Again the requirements were met. Scarcely a week had passed when another demand was made, tripling the original amount. Martens made no attempt to fulfill the quota. A date was set for a public auction of their property, but the authorities cancelled that. Martens' reaction was: "The Lord be praised, another Sunday under our own roof!" Sunday morning Martens preached at the church, but even before his sermon was finished an automobile could be heard in the village. This usually meant bad news. No sooner did the family arrive home after the church service when they were informed that they were to leave the region within 24 hours. All property was to be left behind. Sara Martens and the youngest children were immediately taken to stay with relatives, while Kornelius Martens and the elder four children left by wagon the next day, also to stay with relatives outside the Großweide region.

For some time the family was scattered among relatives or lived in Russian villages. On one occasion they heard rumors that they were to be sent to northern Russia, so they quietly slipped away from their quarters early the next morning. Kornelius Martens eventually obtained employment as a bookkeeper in the Don basin area. In the spring of 1931 he obtained a position as teacher of Latin and German at a medical institute in Stalino (later Donezk). At the same time he also held a job as bookkeeper at a medical library. When Martens eventually found accommodations to stay in, the family gradually moved to Stalino. Martens, his wife Sara and son Heinrich lived in one room; the four girls lived eight kilometers away, and son Kornelius worked at a steel mill 15 kilometers away.

A letter from wife Sara to relatives in Canada depicted the conditions quite graphically. After mentioning that of the seven children they had room for only one to stay with them she went on to describe her husband ". . . Kornelius has aged very much and is grey. He no longer has his thick stomach, which does not hurt him, but circumstances are too hard for

him. He has to be at his place of work by eight in the morning. He drinks his coffee (*Prips*) and eats his piece of bread. Then I give him another piece as large as a hand so that he will have some lunch. He then stays at work until seven or ten, and then he has a good meal, but not meat or milk soup. No, we have butter soup without butter, or borscht and tea. He often rests 15 minutes and then he writes. He is almost ready to collapse, but he says 'I have to continue otherwise you will starve.' I want him to decrease his workload. We wouldn't starve to death so soon . . ."27

Despite her somewhat optimistic tone, Sara in particular became thinner and thinner, spending steadily more time in bed. After a five month illness she died on February 28, 1934, of heart failure.

Without a mother in the home the children tried to maintain the household by themselves. On one occasion they cooked beans which they had forgotten to pre-soak; the results were not very edifying. Martens came to the conclusion that "It just does not work, there has to be a mother in the house."

Anna Davidow Klassen, originally from Ekaterinoslav, had in the past impressed Kornelius Martens; she had contributed several articles to *Unser Blatt*. Through a friend Kornelius now contacted Anna Klassen, and she came to visit the family. It was just too much; she would not be able to accept such responsibility. She left, but soon after, with a change of heart, she wrote back to Kornelius and accepted his proposal of marriage. Since they could not be officially married in a religious ceremony, Kornelius and Anna were married in the home of Rev. Heinrich Harder (originally from Halbstadt, then living in Memrik), with Harder the officiating minister. The wedding took place in August, 1934, and daughter Elfriede remembers that among other things delicious tomatoes were served at the meal following the wedding.<sup>28</sup>

Both Kornelius and Anna worked at the medical institute, both also shared the same deep faith in God. For a while, partly because of the added income of another working person, the economic situation of the family improved. Anna was described by her stepdaughter as energetic, she knew what she

wanted, and was a good mother to them.

In Stalino Kornelius Martens could not ignore his commitment to God and so continued his work as a minister. He led Bible studies, and also preached on occasion. These meetings were held in secret, but even so the room where he spoke was often packed with people.

In the spring of 1937 Martens was once again asked to report to police headquarters. He seemed to have a premonition of impending trouble, because a few weeks prior to his arrest he said: "Soon my turn will come, and my only crime is that I have faithfully served my Lord and Saviour."

On the night of August 6, 1937, the police searched their rooms, some of his papers were confiscated, and Kornelius Martens was taken to jail in Stalino. The cell he shared with two others was so small that only one person could sleep at a time. Once a month a package of food or clothes could be sent to him, or money designated for his use. Anna was able to see and speak to him on only one occasion; by then he was very thin.

When parcels sent to Martens were returned, the family knew that after one year imprisonment in Stalino he had been transferred. Subsequently they discovered that he had been moved to Dnepropetrovsk. On persistent questioning Anna was informed: "Sentenced to ten years exile; no exchange of letters allowed."

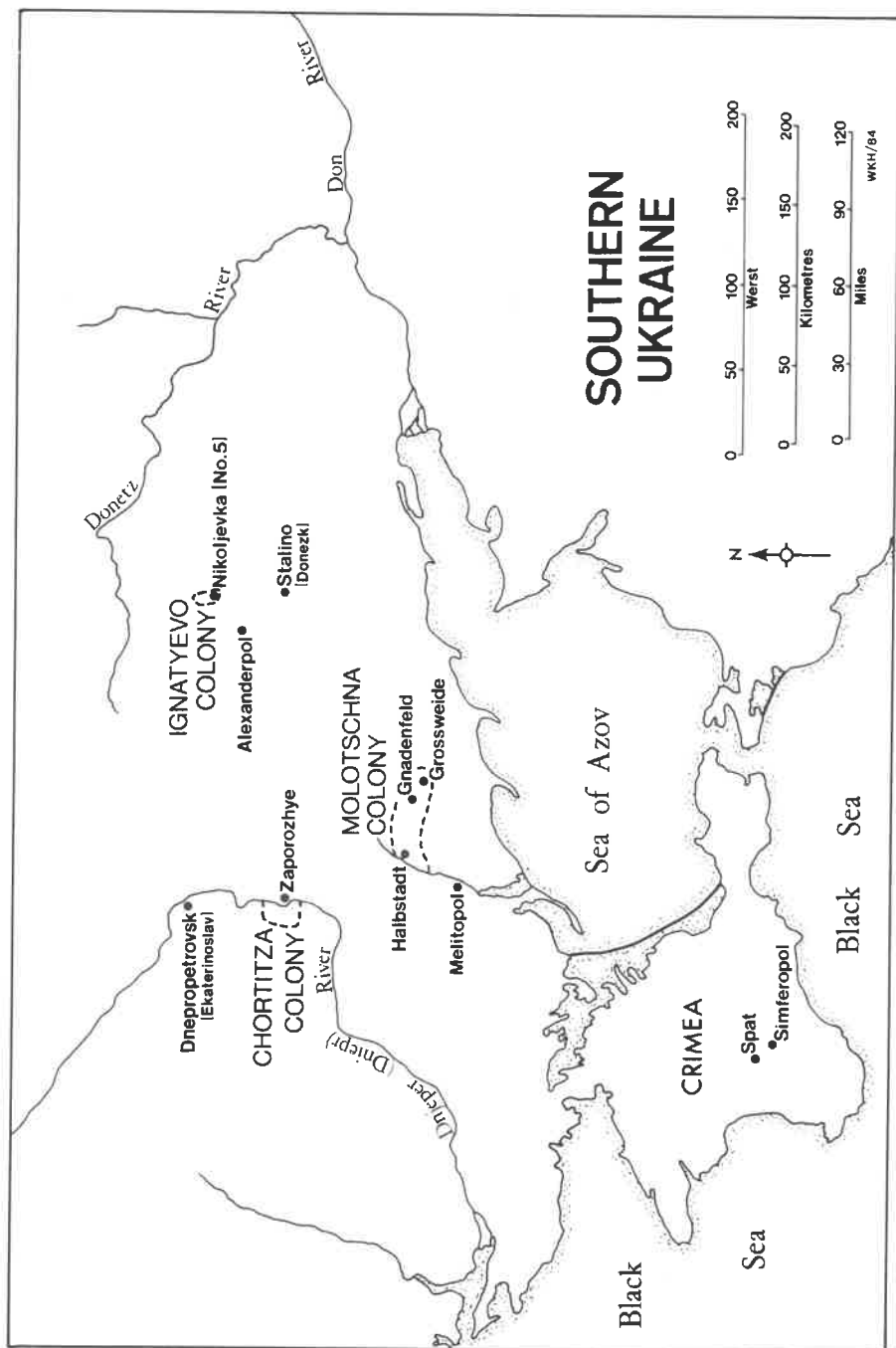
Some time after World War II, Heinrich Martens received information that his father, Kornelius Martens, "died of pneumonia two years after he arrived here." No specific location or date of death were given.

## POSTSCRIPT

After Kornelius Martens was imprisoned Anna Martens and the younger children were asked to leave their accommodations. Anna lost her job, though several months later she again found a teaching position.

During World War II the family was widely separated. Anna, together with Helena and Anneliese were sent to Siberia. Anna died there January 3, 1979. Son Kornelius and his family, daughter Sara, Tusnelda, Heinrich and Elfriede came west as far as Germany. Kornelius and his family as well as Heinrich were sent back to the Soviet Union. Sara and Elfriede eventually reached Canada, while Tusnelda stayed in West Germany.





## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Sara Martens, Biography of Kornelius Martens (unpublished) has been used as information throughout.

<sup>2</sup> Tusnelda Volkmann, "Lebenslauf meines Vaters Kornelius Kornelius Martens" published in *Mennonitische Märtyrer* Vol. I edited by A.A. Toews, 1949. Used as information throughout.

<sup>3</sup> John Klassen, "Spat" published in *Die Krim war unsere Heimat* edited by Martin Durksen, 1977, p. 39.

<sup>4</sup> Gerhard D. Huebert, half-brother of Kornelius Martens, personal information.

<sup>5</sup> Tusnelda Volkmann, daughter of Kornelius Martens, personal interview.

<sup>6</sup> Herman Neufeld, "Die Zentralschule in Nikolajewka" *Friedensstimme*, 20 January 1907, p. 32.

<sup>7</sup> David Hiebert (Huebert), *Friedensstimme*, 30 January 1913, p. 6.

<sup>8</sup> Anna Huebert, half-sister of Kornelius Martens, personal interview.

<sup>9</sup> Anna Huebert, personal interview.

<sup>10</sup> News Item, *Volksfreund*, 25 May 1918, p. 7.

<sup>11</sup> Tusnelda Volkmann, personal interview.

<sup>12</sup> J.B. Toews, *Czars, Soviets and Mennonites* (Newton, Kansas, Faith and Life Press, 1982) pp. 84-86.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 90, quoting Goossen from "Vaterlandsliebe."

<sup>14</sup> Kornelius Martens, "Der alte Gott Eliae lebt noch . . ." published in *Die Hungersnot in Rußland und Unsere Reise um die Welt* by D.M. Hofer (Chicago, K.M.B. Publishing House, 1924) p. 202.

<sup>15</sup> J.H. Tiessen, "Erinnerungen göttlicher Hilfe in schweren Erfahrungen," *Mennonitische Rundschau*, 23 Oc-

tober 1968, pp. 6, 7, 12.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Gerhard Lohrenz, "Die Konferenz in Moskau, 1925," *Der Bote*, 19 January 1983, p. 9.

<sup>18</sup> "Protokoll der Bundeskonferenz der Mennonitengemeinden Rußlands vom 13-18 Jan. 1925 in Moskow," *Mennonitische Rundschau*, 1 April 1925, pp. 5, 8, 9 and 8 April 1925, Beilage, pp. 17-20.

<sup>19</sup> "Bericht aus Rußland" by P.G., *Mennonitische Rundschau*, 18 September 1929, p. 12.

<sup>20</sup> Gerhard Lohrenz, personal interview.

<sup>21</sup> H. Goertz, "Unser Blatt: Geburt und Tod", *Der Bote*, 19 January 1983, p. 1, 2.

<sup>22</sup> "Protokoll der Allukrainischen Konferenz der Vertreter der Mennonitengemeinden in der U.S.S.R. in Melitopol 5-9 Oktober, 1926", *Unser Blatt*, November 1926, pp. 47-51.

<sup>23</sup> Kornelius Martens, *Unser Blatt*, March 1927, p. 176.

<sup>24</sup> Kornelius Martens, personal letter to friends in Mexico dated January 24, 1925.

<sup>25</sup> "Bericht aus Rußland" by P.G. *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> Letter written by an uncle of Kornelius to other members of the Huebert family, likely in 1929 or 1930. Since the fragments of the letter include neither the first nor the last pages, we do not know the exact date it was written, nor which uncle wrote the letter.

<sup>27</sup> Letter written by Sara dated January 29, in Stalino, therefore it must have been 1932 or 1933.

<sup>28</sup> Elfriede Martens, daughter of Kornelius Martens, personal interview.



## Poetry of Kornelius Martens

arranged, where the date of writing  
or initial publication is known, in  
chronological order.



# HERBSTABEND

Draußen pfeift des Herbstes Wind  
durch die alte Eiche,  
Und ein rauher Regen rinnt  
auf das Laub, das bleiche.

Kalter Nebel zieht ins Haus —  
"Kinder, schließt die Türen!  
Treibt den bösen Gast hinaus  
ohne vieles Zieren!"

Mutter heizt den Ofen an.  
O, wie ist das mollig!  
Bei der Teemaschine dann  
gar so traut und drollig.

Und die lieben Kleinen all'  
geh'n zur alten Tante:  
"Tante, bitt' erzähl einmal  
alte Märchen, Tante!"

Tante viel erfahren hat  
in den Jugendtagen.  
Keiner hört sich daran satt  
an vergang'nen Sagen. —

Plötzlich, da der Vater mahnt:  
"Kinder, jetzt zur Ruhe,  
Morgen eh ihr es geahnt  
müßt ihr aus der Truhe."

"Vater, noch ein Märchen nur,"  
schallt es aus der Mitte,  
"Neun erst schlug die Pendeluhr,  
Vater, bitte, bitte!"

Wie man nach der Uhre sieht  
ist sie faßt bei elfe. —  
Seht wie schnell die Zeit entflieht  
Morgen Gott uns helfe. —

Nach ein kurzes Nachtgebet  
Alles liegt im Schlummer  
Ob der böse Sturm auch weht,  
Wir sind ohne Kummer.

From the collection of Elfriede Martens,  
daughter of Kornelius Martens.



## GUTE NACHT

Ruhe glücklich, schlafe leise  
Nach des Tages schwerer Last!  
Höre, wie der Nacht'gall Weise  
Klinget dir zur Abendrast!

Selbst das Blümlein ist entschlafen  
Weil es seine Sonne mißt  
Ruh auch du vom Sturm im Hafen,  
Bis du wieder fröhlich bist!

Oh, ihr schönen, lieben Sterne,  
Leuchtet mild der Mutter mein  
Leuchtet mild aus weiter Ferne  
In ihr trautes Kämmerlein.

Wenn sie betet, weiß ich immer,  
Daß sie auch für mich dort kniet,  
Nicht umsonst so hehrer Schimmer  
Um ihr friedlich Antlitz zieht.

Warst so müde von den Sorgen,  
Doch nun endlich ruht die Brust.  
Schlafe sanft! Der neue Morgen  
Wecke dich zu schöner Lust!

Gute Nacht! Ich möcht' dich küssen  
Doch die Ferne läßt es nicht,  
Darum wird es bleiben müssen  
Bis ich schau dein Angesicht.

From the collection of Elfriede Martens,  
daughter, and Gerhard Huebert, brother of  
Kornelius Martens.

## DIE LETZTE NACHT IM VATERHAUS

Die Jugendzeit war schnell entschwunden,  
nun kam des Lebens hart Gebot;  
noch ein'ge wen'ge heil'ge Stunden,  
dann sollt' ich essen fremdes Brot:  
Am nächsten Morgen sollt' ich ziehen aus  
nach einer letzten Nacht im Vaterhaus.

Nach einem kräft'gen Abendsegen,  
den mir der Vater mit ins Leben gab,  
konnt ich mich hin zur Ruhe legen,  
doch Trän um Träne floß die Wang herab,  
viel Stunden nagte noch im Stroh die Maus  
in jener letzten Nacht im Vaterhaus . . .

Die Mitternacht war längst verstrichen,  
da sah ich plötzlich Lampenschein:  
Auf leisen Sohlen hergeschlichen,  
kam an mein Bett mein Mütterlein.  
Es gab für sie noch einen harten Strauß  
in meiner letzten Nacht im Vaterhaus.

Lang stand sie da in tiefem Kummer  
und sah mich an, der scheinbar schlief,  
nicht störend meinen sanften Schlummer,  
ihr wallend Herze brünstig rief:  
"Ach Gott, bewahre ihn im Sturmgebraus  
nach dieser letzten Nacht im Vaterhaus!"

Dann hauchte sie, ich sah sie zittern,  
auf meine Wange einen sanften Kuß.  
Noch heute will mein Herz zersplittern,  
wenn ich der alten Zeit gedenken muß,  
doch macht es mir die falsche Welt zu kraus  
gedenk ich jener Nacht im Vaterhaus.

Noch heute wein ich bitt're Tränen,  
gedenk ich an mein Mütterlein;  
es dringt ein unermeßlich Sehnen  
in meine wunde Brust hinein.  
Und über alles raget weit hinaus  
ihr Blick aus jener Nacht im Vaterhaus.

From the collection of Gerhard Huebert,  
published in *Mennonitische Rundschau*  
October 11, 1967.

## VIER PAPPELN

Nun mäht die Axt euch nieder,  
Und nimmer steht ihr auf.  
Ich seh euch nimmer wieder;  
Das ist der Welten Lauf.

Ihr hobet kühn und prächtig  
zu Gott das Haupt empor,  
Und brausten Stürme mächtig,  
Euch graute nicht davor.

Nie sah man euch verzagen,  
Der Himmel gab euch Kraft;  
Euch wurde zugetragen  
Aus Tiefen neuer Saft.

Was Elemente schonten,  
Das schont nicht Menschenhand.  
Nicht Fried und Eintracht wohnten  
In diesem harten Land.

Ihr fielet um mit Krachen.  
Wie war mir's Herze schwer!  
Wie wird sich das jetzt machen,  
Wenn eurer Platz ist leer?

Und seid ihr bald verschwunden  
Von eurem alten Ort;  
In meiner Brust die Wunden  
Doch bluten weiter fort.

Denk ich dereinst zurücke:  
"Hier habe ich gespielt!"  
So träum ich von dem Glücke,  
Das war, bevor ihr fielt.

Published in *Friedensstimme* May 30, 1912.

## NACH DER HEIMAT

Ach hätte ich Flügel, so schnell wie der Wind,  
So flög ich von hinnen nach Westen geschwind!  
Ich flög in die Lüfte, zum Himmel empor,  
Durchzöge die Räume nach Niederlands Moor.

Wollt sehen der Ahnen so rühmliche Spur,  
Wollt sehen der Ahnen erkämpfte Flur:  
Mit Wasser und Menschen in ewigem Krieg,  
Erlangten sie endlich den herrlichen Sieg.

Der Vater half bauen, der Sohn mußte fort,  
Mußt fliehen so ferne vom heimischen Ort;  
Er durfte nicht bleiben im Lande so traut,  
Hat Gutes und Böses, Verfolgung geschaut.

Gott hat uns gesegnet, gab Überfluß gar,  
Wir lebten in Frieden manch herrliches Jahr;  
Doch blieb in der Seele ein Sehnen so still,  
Es zieht uns zurücke aus Hülle und Füll.

Der Mensch in der Fremde denkt oft noch zurück,  
Es lockt ihn die Heimat, auch selbst aus dem Glück.  
Du Heimischer Boden, vergangene Zeit,  
Wir sind von einander so weit, ach so weit!

Ach hätte ich Flügel, flög heute noch hin!  
Nach Westen, nach Westen hin flehet der Sinn.  
Wollt meiden die Berge und jegliches Tal,  
Bis grüßt ich die Heimat mit fröhlichem Schall.

Published in *Friedensstimme* July 6, 1918.

## EIN TREUES HERZ

In Stunden voller Weh und Schmerz,  
Wenn alles um dich bricht;  
Dann schmiege dich an ein treues Herz,  
Das dich verkennet nicht.

Schau in ein blaues Augenparr,  
Das Blick von Unschuld spricht,  
Und blicke auf zum Himmel klar,  
So wird es wieder Licht.

Klimmst weiter dann, du Lebender,  
Trotz Tränen im Gesicht;  
Bleibt auch dein Tritt ein bebender,  
Doch du verzagest nicht.

Written October 1, 1921, on the back of a  
certificate for the completion of a level of  
the Gnadenfelder *Handelsschule*.  
From the collection of Anna Huebert, sister of  
Kornelius Martens.  
The actual manuscript has no title for the poem.

## DIE ALTE WEIDE (Erste Fassung)

An dem Dnjepr steht die Weide  
taucht die Zweige in die Flut,  
klaget still von ihrem Leide,  
das ihr weh im Herzen tut.

Sommer war's und grüne Blätter  
schmückten dann ihr schönes Haupt.  
Doch der Herbst im Sturmeswetter  
hat sie alle ihr geraubt.

Traurig sank ein jedes nieder  
in des Dnjeprs kalte Flut.  
Nimmer kehret eines wieder,  
jedes längst im Meere ruht.

Nimmer, nimmer, nimmer —, stöhnen  
Dnjeprwellen Tag und Nacht,  
Wir sind alles lauter Tränen,  
die das Leid hervorgebracht.

Blumen, Gräser, Bäume, Büsche,  
Menschen, Tiere, alles weint,  
wenn hinwegzutun die Frische  
traurig trüb der Herbst erscheint.

Und du wolltest stehn alleine,  
alte Weide, dicht belaubt,  
wenn der Herbst mit seinem Scheine  
alle andern hat beraubt?



Neige nicht so tief die Äste  
in des Dnjeprs kalte Flut.  
Was für andre ist das Beste,  
ist gewiß auch für dich gut.

Written in 1922 after Martens was released  
from his position as director of the school  
in Gnadenfeld.

From the collection of the family, published  
in *Mennonitische Märtyer*, edited by  
A.A. Toews, 1949.

## THE OLD WILLOW

Near the Dnjepr grows the willow,  
branches dipping in its flow,  
plaintive song of pain and sorrow  
softly tells of heart-felt woe.

In the warmth of verdant summer  
leaves adorn her lovely head,  
but comes fall with storm and weather,  
all her verdured beauty fled.

Sadly, singly, each leaf falling  
into Dnjepr's chilling flow;  
not a single one returning;  
to the ocean each must go.

Never, never, never, — groaning  
waves of Dnjepr, night and day.  
We trillion tears affirm the moaning,  
evoked by sorrow on our way.

Flowers, grasses, trees, and bushes,  
beasts and people sadly weep,  
when to sweep away life's freshness  
autumn comes with sadness deep.

And why, old willow, lone here standing  
in thick array of verdure clad,  
deceptive autumn, others leaving  
robbed of their beauty, stark and sad?

Oh, do not dip so deep your branches  
into wide Dnjepr's chilling flow.  
Whatever is the best for others  
most certainly for you must go.

Translation by David D. Duerksen of  
Winnipeg, using the first version.

## DIE ALTE WEIDE

### (Zweite Fassung)

An dem Dnjepr steht die Weide,  
Taucht die Zweige in die Flut,  
Singt ein Lied von ihrem Leide,  
Das so weh dem Herzen tut.

Sommer war's, und grüne Blätter  
Schmückten dann ihr stolzes Haupt.  
Doch der Herbst mit Sturmeswetter  
Hat sie alle ihr geraubt.

Traurig senken sie sich nieder  
In des Stromes kalte Flut,  
Nimmer kehren sie ihr wieder,  
Jedes längst im Meere ruht.

Unheilvoll und klagend stöhnen  
Dnjeprwellen Tag und Nacht:  
Wir sind alles lauter Tränen,  
Die das Leid hervorgebracht.

Blumen, Gräser, Bäume, Büsche,  
Menschen, Tiere — alles weint,  
Wenn hinweg zu tun die Frische,  
Traurig trüb der herbst erscheint.

Und du wolltest stehn alleine,  
Alte Weide, dicht belaubt.  
Wenn nach hellem Sonnenscheine  
Alle andern sind beraubt?

Neige nicht so tief die Äste  
In die kalte Dnjeprflut!  
Was für andre ist das Beste,  
Ist gewiß für dich auch gut!

Published in *Die Hungersnot in Rußland  
und Unsere Reise um die Welt* by D.M.  
Hofer, Chicago, Illinois, 1924.

It is not known why there are two versions of "Die alte Weide". Differences are too great to explain on the basis of misreading of the original text or on typographical errors. One copy may be a revision of the other; from the timing of the original writing and the publication dates it is uncertain which may have been written first. The style of one may be a little more polished than the other, indicating that one may be the later version. Should this be the correct explanation, we will leave the reader to decide which is which.

## DAS BETTELKIND

(Melodie: Was kann es Schön'res geben)

Von aller Welt verlassen, zerlumpt, beschmutzt mit Kot,  
Auf kalten, dunkeln Straßen beklag ich meine Not.

Die Mutter liegt im Grabe, der Vater mich verließ!  
O gib mir eine Gabe, den jedermann verstieß!

Bedecke meine Blöße und still' den Hunger mein!  
O bitte, bitte, flöße mir etwas Liebe ein!

Wie war mein Leben traurig in kalter Sturmesnacht,  
Wenn Winde scharf und schaurig mir wild Musik gemacht!

Mich lehret niemand beten ein Vaterunser fein;  
Verbrecherpfade treten drum bald die Füße mein.

Im Laster auferzogen, im Herzen ungesund,  
Voll Bosheit und verlogen, also geh' ich zu Grund!

Wer bietet voll Erbarmen mir eine Retterhand?  
Wer reißt den blöden Armen weg von des Abgrunds Rand?

Written May, 1923, in Großweide.  
Published in D.M. Hofer, 1924

## TROST

Armes Herz, verzage nicht, Fasse wieder Mut!  
Bald ein neuer Tag anbricht, Der macht alles gut!  
Ist auch schwer und lang die Nacht, Voller Angst und Pein,  
Endlich doch der Morgen lacht Mit dem Sonnenschein.

Nach dem kalten Wolkenguß Neu ersteht das Feld,  
Wenn der Sonne warmer Kuß, Alles warm erhellt.  
Nach des Winters kaltem Hauch Schmelzen Eis und Schnee.  
Blühend steht der Fliederstrauch, Bläulich lacht der See.

Manche Wunde, manchen Riß Heilet bald die Zeit,  
Aber alle ganz gewiß Einst die Ewigkeit!  
Darum, Herz, verzage nicht, Fasse wieder Mut!  
Bald ein neuer Tag anbricht, Der macht alles gut!

Written June, 1923, in the Molotschna.  
Published in D.M. Hofer, 1924.

## SEHNSUCHT

Der Frühling ist erschienen,  
Die Bäume schlagen aus;  
Es summen schon die Bienen  
Aus ihrem Korb heraus.

Sie sammeln Wachs und Honig  
Von bunten Blümchen viel,  
Und allen ist so wonnig  
Nur ich verglimme still.

Mich reizt der Frühling nimmer.  
Das ist mein Element,  
Wenn nicht der Blüten Schimmer,  
Kein Herbsthauch alles trennt.

Wenn bleiche Blätter fallen  
Zur Muttererde hin;  
Wenn Herbsteslieder schallen,  
Beruhigt sich mein Sinn.

Jetzt seh ich alles fröhlich,  
Und doppelt ist mein Gram,  
Weil meine Hoffnung selig  
Das harte Leben nahm.

Written June 13, 1925, in Großweide.  
From the collection of Elfriede Martens,  
daughter.



## SINNSPRUCH

Nicht verzeihen, nicht vergessen  
Das gehört zur Hölle hin.

Zwar verzeihen, nicht vergessen  
Dünkt dem Menschen oft Gewinn.

Doch verzeihen und vergessen,  
Das ist eines Gottes Sinn.

Published in *Unser Blatt*, May, 1926.

## LIED DER LERCHE

Noch ist vom Schnee das Feld nicht leer  
Und noch kein Veilchen da,  
Da steig ich in die Lüfte her  
Und sing: der Lenz ist da!

Verschwunden ist der böse Frost  
Mit allem Ungemach;  
Ein warmer weicher Südwind kost,  
Es schwillt im Tal der Bach.

Schau auf zu mir, du Menschenkind,  
Das unter Sorgen lag,  
Die Dünen bald verschmolzen sind,  
Dann kommt der Ostertag!

Und denkst du, daß kein holdes Glück  
Dir mehr erstehen soll,  
O glaub's, es kann auch dein Geschick  
Wie meins sich ändern wohl.

Ich preise meinen Vater laut,  
Der mich so wohl erhält,  
Daß ich nun wieder hab geschaut,  
Wie sich verjüngt die Welt.

Wirf ab den dumpfen Alltagsgeist!  
Was soll das alte Joch?  
Du selber es genugsam weißt:  
Es kommt der Frühling doch!

Published in *Unser Blatt*, May, 1926.

## Other Writings of Kornelius Martens



## DER ALTE GOTT ELIÄ LEBT NOCH . . .

Da ich Leitender der Gnadenfelder "Professionellen Schule" und zugleich auch Prediger des Evangeliums war, so bekam ich mitten im Jahr den Befehl, mein Amt niederzulegen und die Schule sofort zu verlassen. Dazu stellte man mich unter polizeiliche Aufsicht und belegte mich mit einer hohen Geldsumme. Das waren Stunden, in denen der Glaube auf eine harte Probe gestellt wurde. Wie bitter weh tat es, die geliebte Arbeit auf so eine Art verlassen zu müssen! Hatte ich doch 36 Jahre lang mit Schulen zu tun gehabt . . . Und das viele Geld! In 48 Stunden sollte es da sein. Der Vorstand wußte weder aus noch ein. Um die Summe aufzubringen, sollte ich einen bedeutenden Teil meiner Nahrung verkaufen. Ich klagte Gott meine Not. Was hätte ich sonst auch tun können? Bald legte sich die Stimme in meinem Innern, und ich konnte vertrauensvoll zu meiner mit mir betenden Familie sagen: "Gott kann uns vor dem Hunger bewahren, auch wenn wir unser Korn verkaufen müssen!" Und der Herr half wunderbar. Zur festgesetzten Stunde konnte ich das Strafgeld erlegen, und an demselben Tage erhielt ich auch noch eine Anweisung auf ein Paket Lebensmittel. Er, der die Herzen der Menschen lenkt wie Wasserbäche, gab es meinem früheren Schüler in Amerika ins Herz, mir etwas zu schicken und zu so einer Zeit, da ich es am nötigsten brauchte.

Written by Kornelius Martens as leading  
minister of the Sparrau church, May, 1923.  
Published in D.M. Hofer, 1924.

## WINTER

Der Sommer ist längst dahin, der Herbst auch vorbeigerauscht und gegenwärtig herrscht der Winter mit seiner Strenge. Gestern schüttelte dieser gestrenge Herr ein paar Mal so recht unwillig sein Haupt, und die Flocken flogen über die Erde. Heute ist er ruhiger geworden, hat aber seinen beißenden Frost als Stellvertreter gesandt . . . Und da hilft auch kein Betteln und Herbeiwünschen des Frühlings, selbst wenn die Kinder singen: "Lieber Frühling, komm doch wieder, holder Frühling, komm doch bald!"

Excerpt from a letter sent to friends  
in Mexico, dated January 24, 1925.

## SCHÄCHERS GNADE

(Lukas 23, 39-43)

Viele Menschen berufen sich auf die Gnade, welche dem Schächer am Kreuze zu teil wurde. Noch in der letzten Stunde, trotz einem Leben voller Sünden, Gesetzlosigkeit und Übeltaten wurde er begnadigt und von Jesu in sein Reich aufgenommen. Ja, die Gnade ist groß, unermesslich groß, und sie ist nicht zu ergründen. Ein Gebet, eine Anerkennung dessen, der auf Golgatha für uns litt, ein Hinrichten des Blickes auf Jesum — und die Gnade ist da. Wunderbar, herrlich, tröstend, nicht wahr?

Damit aber die Gnade, welche Gott in seinem Erbarmen den Menschen selbst in der letzten Stunde darreicht, nicht gemißbraucht werde und die Erkenntnis der allumfassenden göttlichen Liebe nicht irgend jemandem zum Verderben gereichen möchte, indem er sich von Gottes herrlichen Eigenschaften ein sanftes Ruhekissen macht, so laßt uns einmal diese Gnade und Liebe näher betrachten.

Als erste Tatsache tritt uns entgegen, daß lange nicht alle von dieser Gnade Gottes Gebrauch machen können oder wollen. Am Kreuze hingen zwei Übeltäter, und der eine ging spottend und lästernd hinüber in die Ewigkeit, trotzdem daß Jesus ihm in letzter Stunde so nahe war, ja trotzdem, daß Gottes Gnade in seiner Gegenwart seinem Genossen in finsternen Taten dargereicht wurde. Auch ihm wird die Liebe Gottes angeboten; besser, er wird von seinem Kameraden an sein wüstes Leben erinnert und auf Christum gewiesen: wir sind billig drinnen, denn wir empfangen, was unsere Taten wert sind; dieser aber hat nichts Ungeschicktes getan. (V.41.) Aber für ihn gab es kein Heute, kein Paradies, keine

Sündenvergebung, keine Rettung. Er ging eben verloren. Oder meinst du vielleicht: Der Tor! so sind nicht alle; ich wenigstens wäre nicht so gewesen. Und doch gehen viele in Nacht und Graus hinüber in die Ewigkeit. Ich erinnere nur an einen Agag, jenen harten Mann, der mit den Worten auf den Lippen starb: Also muß man des Todes Bitterkeit vertreiben (1. Sam. 15, 32), an Saul, der in Verzweiflung seinem Leben ein Ende machte.

Nach dieser Warnung betrachten wir uns einmal den Schächer, der ins Paradies ging, und untersuchen einmal, wie er die Gnade empfing und welche Folgen sie für ihn brachte.

Vor allem hören wir ihn sprechen (V.40) von einer Furcht vor Gott, also er rechnete mit Gott und mit einer Begegnung mit ihm, dem verzehrenden Feuer. Und da erwachte in ihm die Erkenntnis seiner eigenen Sündhaftigkeit und seiner Verdammungswürdigkeit. Dies ist gewöhnlich der erste Schritt zum Heile. Infolge dieser Erkenntnis gab es bei ihm ein völliges Drangeben seiner eigenen Gerechtigkeit, er brach über sich den Stab nach jeder Beziehung.

Zweitens konnte er diese Erkenntnis nicht für sich behalten, sondern sie wurde zum Bekenntnis, wie es beim verlorenen Sohn der Fall war: Ich habe gesündigt vor Gott und Menschen, ja noch andere mitgezogen, anstatt sie auf der breiten Bahn aufzuhalten. Dies liegt in dem Worte "wir" und "unsere Taten"; und er versucht wenigstens in der letzten Stunde noch den Stein, den er bei seinem Mitgenossen mit ins Rollen gebracht hat, vor dem Abgrunde aufzuhalten. Leider vergebens; aber er, der Gerettete, war ehrlich in seinem Bestreben, und Gott sieht das Herz an.

Weiter blieb er nicht bei sich stehen, sondern ihm wird Jesus, der ihm in so ernster Stunde nahe gebracht wird, groß. Er, Jesus, hat nichts Übles getan, so klingt es von seinen Lippen, und wir lesen zwischen den Zeilen, aus dem Klange der Worte: Aber so viel Gutes. Er ist Sündern nachgegangen, hat sie aufgesucht und gerettet. Vielleicht ist Hoffnung für mich? Das ist der richtige Weg: Nach der Erkenntnis seiner Schuld — die Erkenntnis der göttlichen Huld; nach meiner Niederträchtigkeit — Gottes Erhabenheit; nach unserer Unreinigkeit



— seine Heiligkeit.

Aber Gott sei gelobt, nicht nur bei Jesu Schuldlosigkeit und Gottes Heiligkeit blieb der Verbrecher stehen, sondern er machte den letzten Schritt und stürzte sich hinein in das Meer seiner Gnade. Zwar war seine Bitte zaghaft, und kein Begehren von einem Platze im Paradiese oder wenigstens auf der Schwelle desselben als Türhüter, wie es manchmal zagende Herzen tun, sondern nur um ein Gedenken wird gefleht. Was weiter mit diesem Worte zusammenhing oder die Folge davon sein könnte, davon redet er nicht. Wie Gott es macht, wird es gut sein. Ihm, dem Schuldigen, wird es Linderung sein, wenn er in der Ewigkeit wissen wird: Er denket an mich; denn er hat's versprochen. Und sollte mein Platz doch in der Hölle sein, dieses Versprechen und dieser Trost versüßt mir alle Qualen. Hoffnung spricht aus diesen Worten.

Hoffnung aber läßt nicht zu schanden werden: Jesus wendet sich zu ihm und gibt dem Hoffenden, der zu einem Glaubenden geworden ist, seine Gnade.

Kein Vorwurf wegen der vielen Übeltaten, kein Erinnern an die verscherzte Zeit und an verlorene Gelegenheiten findet statt. Auch nicht ein Blitzstrahl von Sinai zuckt dazwischen, um das mürbe Herz noch mehr zu zerschlagen, nein, nur ein Blick der Gnade und des Erbarmens trifft den Armen. Wie lauscht sein Herz der Botschaft vom Kreuze: Noch heute — im Paradiese — und dieses wird von einem Wahrlich bestätigt. Hier war unendlich mehr geschenkt worden, als der Sünder erhofft hatte; denn Gottes Liebe gibt über Bitten und Verstehen. Seine Gnade ist eben ein Meer, das keine Ufer hat, und seine Güte reicht, so weit der Himmel — das Universum — ist.

Und wir? Wir stehen am Kreuze und staunen. Gott geöffnet im Fleische vor uns — Er, das unschuldige Lamm, bittend für Sünder, hängt am blutigen Marterholz, und wir mit unseren Sünden liegen unter dem Kreuze. Düstere Nacht umhüllt alles, aber plötzlich bricht die Gnadensonne durch die Nacht, und der erste Strahl fällt auf Jesum und bricht sich an ihm und dringt in unser Herz. Dazu rauschen die Harfen der

himmlischen Sänger ähnlich wie am Weihnachtsfeste: Ehre sei Gott in der Höhe und Friede auf Erden und den Menschen ein Wohlgefallen. Das ist Schächers Gnade.

Published in *Unser Blatt*, April, 1927.

## AN EVALUATION

The poems of Kornelius Martens which have survived are a testimony to a profound life of the spirit in the midst of dismal and eventually desperate circumstances. Like other Mennonite poets of the time and place, Martens uses the language of a Russian Mennonite lifestyle, of house, village and customs, together with the traditional nature imagery which he had encountered in his reading — and which represents the kind of imaginative freedom considered proper — to express those personal and yet universal feelings which characterize the human journey through time.

“Herbstabend” shows the protection of house and home against the elements, while at the same time hinting at the imaginative escape through fairy tales which compensate for the confinement of protection. “Die letzte Nacht im Vaterhaus” relates an unforgettable moment of parting, while “Gute Nacht” is a poignant greeting to his mother following that leavetaking. “Nach der Heimat” is a poem of homesickness, but surprisingly, a longing for the origins in “Niederlands Moor”, and a celebration of the victory over “Wasser und Menschen” which is the history of his uprooted people. “Vier Pappeln” and “Die alte Weide” use tree imagery as metaphors to express a sense of loss. The poplars are ‘mowed down’ mercilessly and seemingly without cause. They had been symbols of life and hope and had stood up well to the natural storms of life, but the ax which cut them down is both unnatural and cruel — the pain will remain unassuaged. The old willow, on the other hand, suffers a natural fate, and though this is sad, it has its own reasons and ultimate justification. The imagery in these poems is mature and subtle, reminding the reader of some of the finest German poetry. The lines:

Blumen, Gräser, Bäume, Büsche,  
Menschen, Tiere, alles weint,  
wenn hinwegzutun die Frische  
traurig trüb der Herbst erscheint.

are reminiscent of:

Blumen, Augen, Wald und Hügel  
Steh'n bei deinem Hauch in Tränen.

lines taken from Goethe's "Westöstlicher Divan". It seems to me that the first version of "Die alte Weide" is the more powerful of the two, for example in the rhythm of "Nimmer, nimmer, nimmer —, stöhnen/Dnjeprwellen Tag und Nacht," instead of the more rationalized "Unheilvoll und klagend stöhnen . . ."

"Das Bettelkind" is a powerful statement provoked by drastic life experience, boldly breaking down the traditional verse forms and images, although these assert themselves again in "Trost," "Lied der Lerche" and "Sehnucht." The last of these, though, creates a hard contrast by its use of negatives. Its conclusion states directly the fate of this strong, sensitive poet:

. . . doppelt ist mein Gram,  
Weil meine Hoffnung selig  
Das harte Leben nahm.

In his short "Sinnspruch" or epigram, Martens writes:

Doch verzeihen und vergessen,  
Das ist eines Gottes Sinn.

One has the feeling, after reading these poems and the biography of their author, that he indeed forgave much. That hard fate which took from him his home, his loved ones, his livelihood, certainly the idyllic beauty he saw and sought — that fate also took his own life and thereby saved him from the hell of 'not forgetting' what he had forgiven.

Victor G. Doerksen  
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## PUBLICATIONS IN WHICH POETRY AND PROSE OF KORNELIUS MARTENS WAS PUBLISHED

*Friedensstimme* (Voice of Peace) was a Mennonite Brethren sponsored German-language paper founded by Jakob and Abram Kroeker in 1903. The Kroekers lived in Spat, Crimea, but since it was impossible to publish inside Russia because of Czarist censorship, they first had the paper printed in Berlin. The editors moved to Halbstadt in the Molotschna, and also managed to switch publication to this locale in 1906. From 1903 to 1906 *Friedensstimme* came out twice a month, then from 1906-1908 weekly, and thereafter twice a week. By March, 1913, circulation had reached its maximum at 5,800. The paper contained articles of inspiration and theological exposition, reports on foreign and home missions, discussion of various local questions, as well as news from Mennontie settlements. Here and there poetry (including several poems by Kornelius Martens) found its way into the busy pages. With the outbreak of World War I, and the Czarist decree prohibiting the use of German in either public assembly or press, publication ceased though Abraham Kroeker remained the editor. By May, 1917, the Provisional Government of Kerensky had not yet revoked the ban on German, but with a lengthy explanation the paper again appeared, first under the name *Volksfreund* (Friend of the People), then after July, 1918, it reverted to *Friedensstimme*. Publication apparently continued until the summer of 1920,

when Abraham Kroeker was forced to flee. (See J.B. Toews, "A Voice of Peace in Troubled Times", *Mennonite Life*, September, 1972, pp. 93-95.)

*Die Hungersnot in Rußland und Unsere Reise um die Welt* (The Famine in Russia and our Journey around the World) by D.M. Hofer is a book published in 1924 by the K.M.B. Publishing House of Chicago, Illinois. D.M. Hofer had travelled to Russia to help in the Mennonite Central Committee (M.C.C.) distribution of food, clothing and other goods during the *Hungersnot* (Famine) of 1922-1923. He also held evangelistic services in many of the regions where he travelled among the Mennonites. The first part of the book describes and illustrates the conditions he found in Russia. The second section consists of a collection of poems, articles and words of thanks from the Mennonites in Russia. Among these is some poetry and prose by Kornelius Martens. The last part of the book is a travelogue of the trip around the world.

*Unser Blatt* (Our Paper), as mentioned in the biography of Kornelius Martens, was a paper initiated by a decision of the *Bundeskonzferenz der Mennonitengemeinden Rußlands* (General Conference of Mennonite Churches in Russia) held in Moscow in January 1925. Alexander Ediger was editor, Kornelius Martens secretary-treasurer. Martens also contributed articles and poetry which were published by the paper. Despite difficulties, *Unser Blatt* first appeared in October, 1925, with a monthly run of about 2,500. At the October, 1926, All Ukrainian Conference of Mennonite Churches, the management was encouraged to publish more often, though Kornelius Martens pointed out that this would likely not be possible. It was produced in Melitopol, and continued publication until at least June, 1928.

## DATES AND CALENDARS

No attempt has been made in this book to differentiate or correct dates as to the Julian (Old Style) or Gregorian (New Style) calendars. The Julian calendar was in use in Russia until February, 1918, when the revolutionary government decreed a switch to the Gregorian calendar. It was simply decreed that February 1 would be February 14, thereby catching up the 13 days difference which had accumulated through the centuries. The Russian Orthodox Church, however, still maintained the Julian calendar. Some Mennonites corrected all their family records to reflect the change in calendar, others did not. Whether or not the Martens family made this correction is not known. In any case it is likely that all dates subsequent to February 14, 1918, are according to the Gregorian (New Style) calendar.



# *Kornelius Martens*

## OUR SKILLFUL ADVOCATE

Kornelius Martens is described as:

*"Our advocate was teacher and minister Kornelius Martens . . . He was very skillful in his representations . . ."*

J.H. Tiessen

Poetry of Kornelius Martens:

*" . . . simplicity of universal images . . . personal experience against a backdrop of hard times . . . genuineness of experience and emotion . . ."*

David D. Duerksen, Winnipeg

*"The poems of Kornelius Martens which have survived are a testimony to a profound life of the spirit in the midst of dismal and eventually desperate circumstances."*

Victor G. Doerksen, Winnipeg

Purpose of the book:

*"I was forced to conclude . . . that he was indeed unusual . . . a man who had a strong faith in God and love for his fellow beings . . . I believe it is worth collecting, preserving and studying the little that can be found of what Kornelius Martens has written . . ."*

Helmut T. Huebert, Winnipeg



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